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Why are we unable to say this
to our blood brothers, share this with them,
across a common table touch, create
a trusted fellowship, why can't we?

Why is the world always easier to fix
than our own homes?

DOES YOUR MAMA KNOW ABOUT ME?

THROUGHOUT THE 1980S, MANY OF US GRIEVED THE LOSS OF friends, lovers, and relatives who were one moment strong, healthy, and able-bodied, but then in an instant they became thin-framed, emaciated, hacking and wheezing, their bodies wracked with horrible pain. Sometimes brave souls would return to the family roost to disclose their sexuality and ask permission to die in familiar surroundings. Too often, families were discovering for the first time that the dear brother, the favorite uncle, the secretive son was a homosexual, a Black gay man, and the unfortunate victim of the killer virus, AIDS. Some parents had always known and some had never suspected that their son was a Black gay man, a sissy, a queer, a faggot. For some families this shocking discovery and grief expressed itself as shame and anger; it compelled them to disown their flesh and blood, denying dying men the love and support that friends often provided as extended family. In other instances families were very understanding and bravely stood by their brethren through their final days.

Joseph Beam, in his powerful essay "Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart," from *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1986), defined *home* as being larger, more complex and encompassing than one's living room:

> When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most